

## 1. Grassroots Gathering VI (April 29, 2019)

The purpose of the Grassroots Gathering was to reinvigorate the momentum with community stakeholders that had previously participated in past gatherings as well as invite new members of the community, agencies, and organizations of Calgary to participate. There were a total of 42 participants, including five Elders, seven new community organization partners, and multiple volunteers.

Half the day was dedicated to revisiting the Community Goals, Activities, and Timelines for the Strategic Community Areas of Focus (CIRCLES) that had been established in 2018. Time was spent validating that work and introducing new perspectives to continue the work forward.

The Gathering was co-hosted by the Human Rights and Discrimination Circle, who took the opportunity to announce their Anti-Racism Community Grant. They led an afternoon brainstorm session to receive feedback from community stakeholders in order to identify themes emerging in our city in relation to experiences of systemic and individual racism and discrimination. The afternoon included an experiential exercise using Theatre of Oppression practices to demonstrate real-life scenarios and how to approach or intervene.

The Community Action Plan was updated for the next two years of focus by the Community Circles to include: Justice, Healing & Resiliency, Culture & Language, Elders & Youth, and Careers & Resources. As the co-host of the event, the Human Rights & Discrimination Circle provided new connections to take root and strengthened existing collaborative efforts in development.

In the afternoon brainstorm session the Human Rights Circle sought to gain community input to inform their project areas of focus, timelines and milestones. The targeted discussions included the following summary from community members:

### **Summary of Systemic Racism in the Health Care System**

- Differential treatment in emergency room by triage personnel, so feel unsafe to disclose;
- South Hospital ER: had to sit in the waiting room with IV for 4 days to flush out inflamed area for lack of a bed, but others came and went.
- Foothills ER: refused treatment because there was a note on the file saying “drug-seeking” even though had been clean and sober for many years. Went to Lougheed ER and ended up with surgery on my stomach.
- Kicked out of hospital at unsafe time in middle of the night, forced to walk home a very long distance because no car/driver/cab and then hit by a drunk driver en route.
- Lack of access to the health care system due to prejudice and if get upset, accused of being an angry Indian leading to further stereotyping.
- Wrongful assumption that UTI in my daughter was a case of child molestation.

- Lack of Indigenous (liaison) social workers when needed – inappropriate assignment of an Aboriginal candy stripper instead.
- Lack of AHS long-term care facility for Indigenous people in Calgary, as well as Indigenous liaison caregivers.
- Characterized as “Angry Indian” if upset with poor treatment or lack of deeper understanding of the situation.

#### **Summary of Systemic Racism in the Justice System:**

- Racial profiling/carding by police officer over seatbelt issue during a cab ride.
- Lack of confidence around personal safety within the justice system leading to avoidance of police when they need help.
- Fear of being thrown in jail for no reason.

#### **Summary of Systemic Racism in the Education System:**

- Residential school, Indian Day Schools, systemic legacy of discrimination and hate.
- Present day fighting in schools because of Indigenous ancestry (males).
- Current hard time in high schools because of ancestry (females).

#### **Summary of Individual and Systemic Racism in the Private Sector, ie. “Walking on Eggshells”:**

- Restaurants – other people stop talking when Indigenous couple enters.
- Gas stations – asking permission to use the bathroom and having to justify use and time.
- Retail stores – refusal to sell mouthwash and hairspray because of assumption of drug abuse.
- Grocery stores – followed around because of the assumption that you’re stealing.
- Hotels – illegal “native tax” or extra charge for assumed damage to the room.
- Cabs – request for fares up front because of assumption that you may not pay.
- Apartments – when you show up to see a rental unit, told it was already taken.

#### **Elders & Youth Circle Summary Discussion**

- Watched by store security: feelings of intimidation.
- Being stopped by police.
- Oppressive thoughts & comments at an event.
- Discrimination of ½ White and ½ Indigenous, “fighting Indian Wars”
- Person using derogatory terms in a public space (ie. restaurant).

Overall, the participants found the day useful from both a strategic planning standpoint and as a way to garner input from them on the current realities that still plague the city in regards to racism and discrimination against Indigenous peoples. There were some comments where people felt there is never enough time to really focus on these topics, and that feedback, along with the strategic areas, are why the Human Rights Circle chose the resulting workshop session topics for this project.

Learning Circles, Building Relations through Reconcili-Action

The Circle contracted Blackfoot Elder and Knowledge Keeper Aa'stai-pooiyii (talking towards you) , Ashley Prairie Chicken, to design and facilitate full day Learning Circles for the project. Ashley used oral traditions and modern storytelling methods to empower, bring awareness, and demonstrate living with unconditional regard to remove perception and have an open heart: unconditional love "kiimopiipitssinnii". The activities he facilitated were the Thought Process Card exercise, Circle in a Box, and the Back Pack exercise. The sessions ended with a Talking Circle, which then moved into an afternoon of brainstorming with the group.

The first question explored barriers to each respective organizational journey moving truth and reconciliation forward at the practice, procedural, and policy levels. Following that was sharing what steps can be taken to eliminate the barriers, ending with an action or strategy to take.

Ashley was responsible for this portion of the project until the pandemic and lockdown prevented the in-person sessions from continuing. The Circle continued to lend planning and logistic support, while adapting to virtual engagement and coordination.